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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

BLACKBIRD CONTROL IN CORNFIELDS

In sections of the country where lakes and marsh areas abound, red-winged blackbirds often become troublesome to stands of corn, and during their fall migration these birds, in company with flocks of the larger grackles, may locally become decidedly injurious to this crop. To devise measures for preventing or lessening such losses, the Biological Survey has conducted experiments in blackbird control in a number of States.

Wholesale reduction of the numbers of blackbirds over extensive areas has been found impractical with the methods now at hand. Much can be done by the individual farmer, however, in protecting his own crops. Poisoned baits have been found effective in this respect, their greatest value lying, not in the possibility of killing large numbers of blackbirds, but in the frightening or deterring effect produced by killing even a limited number. In common with the crow and some other birds, blackbirds are inclined to shun fields in which some of their numbers have been killed by poisoned baits.

PREPARING POISONED BAIT:

For the base, use ordinary scratch feed containing cracked corn, milo, oats, and other grain; and for the poison, powdered strychnine alkaloid. The poison, mixed with starch paste, is applied to the outside of the grain. Following are the proportions of these elements for varying quantities of bait:

<u>Scratch Feed</u>	<u>Strychnine Alkaloid</u>	<u>Starch Paste</u>
5 quarts (dry measure)	1/6 ounce	2/3 pint
20 quarts (dry measure)	2/3 ounce	2-1/2 pints
1 bushel	1 ounce	2 quarts

Make the starch paste by dissolving a quantity of ordinary laundry starch in a little cold water and stir well, as enough boiling-hot water is added to make the paste of the consistency of ordinary cream. To the quantity of strychnine required add first a like bulk of the starch paste and mix thoroughly; then, still stirring, add the rest of the paste needed for the quantity indicated. After stirring well, pour this poison over the scratch feed in a box or tub and mix thoroughly until the kernels are evenly coated. Let the bait dry for a few hours or over night before using. Poisoned grain thus prepared will withstand a shower or two but exposure to prolonged or repeated rains will cause it to lose its effectiveness.

DISTRIBUTING THE BAIT:

Scatter the poisoned grain in stands of corn by taking a handful at a time and, holding it either to one side or behind, letting it filter slowly through the fingers while walking at a moderate pace between the rows.

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Only those areas in which damage by blackbirds has been noted should be so treated. One handful of bait spread as directed will cover about 50 linear feet in the row, and poison scattered in every other row is sufficient. Usually 5 to 10 quarts of poisoned grain will cover the damaged section. Stands of corn supporting a heavy crop of weeds can not be satisfactorily poisoned.

These baits should not be placed in fields to which turkeys, ducks, geese, and young chickens have access. Chickens possess a marked immunity from strychnine poisoning, but the other birds mentioned are susceptible and must be kept out of baited fields. When the bait is scattered as directed there is no danger to stock that subsequently may be pastured in the fields.